

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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P R 081445Z APR 76

FM AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0486

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMCONSUL BILBAO

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

UNCLAS BORDEAUX 0034

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: SECURITY SITUATION IN FRENCH BASQUE REGION

1. TWO SEPARATE INCIDENTS HAVE WORSENERED THE SECURITY SITUATION ALONG THE FRENCH-SPANISH BORDER IN THE BASQUE REGION. THE FIRST INCIDENT IS RELATED TO THE REPORTED ESCAPE OF 29 SPANISH POLITICAL PRISONERS, INCLUDING BASQUE NATIONALISTS, FROM THE PENITENTIARY IN SEGOVIA ON APRIL 5. ACCORDING TO LOCAL SOURCES A SMALL NUMBER OF THESE PRISONERS (I.E., FOUR OR FIVE) ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SUCCEEDED IN CROSSING THE BORDER BETWEEN THE SPQNIISH TOWN OF RONCEVALLES AND ST JEAN PIED DE PORT, ON THE FRENCH SIDE OF THE BORDER IN THE PYRENEE MOUNTAIN REGION. FRENCH AUTHORITIES ARE SEARCHING FOR THE PRISONERS BUT HAVE NOT FOUND THEM. GOF OFFICIALS HAVE NO CONFIRMATION PRISONERS ACTUALLY CROSSED BORDER, BUT ARE ACTING ON INFORMATION PROVIDED TO THEM BY SPANISH OFFICIALS. THE MOUNTAINOUS BASQUE TERRITORY AROUND ST JEAN PIED DE PORT IS A NATURAL SHELTER FOR SUCH ESCAPEES.

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2. THE SECOND INCIDENT INVOLVES THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TWO SPANISH POLICE OFFICIALS FROM (RPT) FROM) SAN-SEBASTIEN WHO REPORTEDLY CROSSED THE BORDER AT HENDAYE ON APRIL 4 AND WHO HAVE BEEN MISSING EVER SINCE. TWO HYPOTHESES ARE THAT THEY CROSSED THE BORDER FOR A PERSONAL VISIT OR THAT THEY WERE ON A COVERT MISSION. THE SPANISH CONSUL GENERAL AT BAYONNE HAS LODGED A FORMAL COMPLAINT BEFORE THE LOCAL FRENCH JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT THEY HAVE BEEN KIDNAPPED. LOCAL FRENCH AUTHORITIES ARE MAKING AN INTENSIVE SEARCH TO TRY TO FIND THEM BUT HAVE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL TO DATE. IT IS ASSUMED THAT THE ETA MAY BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS INCIDENT. HOWEVER, LOCAL AUTHORITIES CONFIRM IT WOULD MARK A DEPARTURE FROM ESTABLISHED ETA POLICY TO AVOID TERRORIST ACTIONS AGAINST SPANISH TARGETS ON FRENCH SIDE OF BORDER, SINCE SUCH ACTIVITY COULD DAMAGE REFUGEE STATUS OF SPANISH BASQUES IN FRANCE, AND ESPECIALLY IN BORDER REGION.

3. LOCAL FRENCH AITHORITIES HAVE INCREASED SECURITY MEASURES IN THE BASQUE REGION IN THE WAKE OF THESE INCIDENTS. THE SITUATION HAD BEEN RELATIVELY CALM IN RECENT MONTHS.

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